RESTORATION PROJECT FEATURES

Longleaf Pine Restoration on the Hitchiti Experimental Forest

- Kenneth W. Outcalt

The Hitchiti Experimental Forest is a 4735-acre research forest within the larger Oconee National Forest. It is named after the Native Americans, which once occupied the region. These early inhabitants lived along the Ocmulgee River and its tributaries. They often used fire to clear land for planting and to facilitate hunting. European settlement accompanied by timber harvest and land clearing for agriculture began in the early 1800's. By 1860, nearly all of the present day land occupied by the Hitchiti had been cleared and was being cultivated. When cotton succumbed to the boll weevil the area was abandoned and regenerated to pines and native hardwoods. In 1946, the Federal Government acquired the land to establish a National Forest.

The historical range of longleaf pine included the southern portion of Georgia from the coast up to the Piedmont and into the western highlands. Along the northern edge of this range, it often occurred in mixed stands with loblolly and shortleaf pines. The southern edge of Jones County, where the Hitchiti is located, was included in this transition zone. In spite of its history of logging followed by agriculture and subsequent erosion,

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there are still a few relic longleaf pines on the experimental forest. Recently we have begun some small scale planting of longleaf pine to restore this species to its native habitat.

In January 2000, two sites on the Hitchiti were planted with containerized longleaf pine. The sites had been clear-cut following beetle caused mortality. Both sites were planted with a mixture of loblolly and longleaf pine to emulate the historical forest composition. Longleaf seeds were from the montane region of Alabama. Because recent fire has been much less prevalent than in the past, the areas had a considerable amount of hardwood competition. Some of each area was treated with herbicide to determine if this was required for successful establishment. To date survival has been acceptable, around 65 percent for longleaf and 85 for loblolly. Both species are at active height growth and overall the test has been a success. For future restoration plantings, however, rather the planting longleaf and loblolly in adjoining rows, we will likely use a more clumped distribution or plant only longleaf and allow natural regeneration of loblolly from surrounding trees.

Viera Scrub Restoration

- Kevin L. Erwin

As a result of reducing and mitigating impacts from the Viera development in Brevard County, Florida's approximately 412 acres of Coastal Xeric Scrub and Scrubby Pine Flatwoods have been restored and managed annually from 1994 to the present thanks to the efforts of the Viera Company and the Viera Community Development District. This restoration area required a habitat management plan and conservation easement that required the 412 acres to be restored and managed in perpetuity. These requirements were the result of US Fish and Wildlife Service Section 7 Consultation and a Corps of Engineers 404 Dredge and Fill permit. Kevin L. Erwin Consulting Ecologist, Inc. (www.environment.com) is responsible for the design, management and monitoring of this restoration project.

Prior to management only one family of Florida scrub jays (Federally endangered species) of approximately three adults occupied the 412 acres. On the average a family of Florida scrub jays occupies 25 acres. The reason more scrub jays were not present is the habitats were badly overgrown due to fire suppression or lack of mechanical treatment. According to the management plan the 412 acres were divided into 13 different management units that ranged in size from3 acres to 68 acres with the average size being 28 acres. Two to three management units are managed annually to provide a mosaic of habitat stages. Prescribed burning and mechanized land clearing by roller chop-

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ping and hand clearing (chain saws) are